

The HORSE

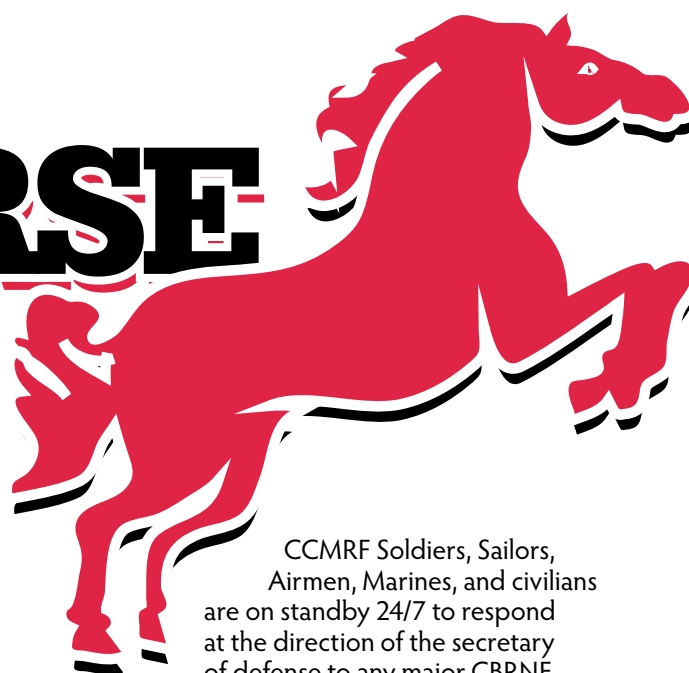
Rehearses Swift Response

Airmen sharpen skills during largest ever RED HORSE stateside deployment for consequence management exercise

Capt Nicholas Anderson
820 RHS/CE

Fourteen Airmen from the 820th RED HORSE Squadron drive up to a sight of utter devastation. The scenario: A nuclear device explosion has created untold destruction and loss of life. Massive debris stacked eight feet high, overturned vehicles, and live utility lines cover two kilometers of the landscape ahead, creating an impenetrable barrier for emergency response personnel.

This was just one of many scenarios rehearsed during a November 2009 Joint Service chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear, and high-yield explosive (CBRNE) exercise in southeast Indiana. Operation VIBRANT RESPONSE 10.1 at Camp Atterbury, Ind., was one of two comprehensive exercises directed by USNORTHCOM to prepare CBRNE Consequence Management Response Force (CCMRF) personnel for the worst of their planning scenarios — a nuclear device exploding in a major city.



CCMRF Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, Marines, and civilians are on standby 24/7 to respond at the direction of the secretary of defense to any major CBRNE catastrophe in the NORTHCOM area

of responsibility that requires DOD capabilities. The 820 RHS, Nellis AFB, Nev., was notified (in June 2009) of its support role in the CCMRF, and has 126 personnel and more than 800 short tons of cargo allocated to the mission.

About 2,800 CCMRF personnel participated in November's exercise, which simulated a nuclear explosion near a large city. The 820 RHS deployed 122 Airmen and 758 short tons of cargo, which according to Air Force Civil Engineering's historian, Dr. Ronald Hartzler, is "the largest RED HORSE stateside deployment that I can find in my records."

RED HORSE's Role

Why was RED HORSE, a low density-high demand enabler unit, tasked with the mission?

"RED HORSE has the capability to project integrated Air Force Engineer capabilities anytime, anywhere with little to no notice," said Mr. Ron Clouse, from AFNORTH civil engineer operations. "NORTHCOM wanted DOD-controlled uniformed forces and knew that RED HORSE had the ability to provide what they wanted, an available first response heavy engineering capability."

Defense Support to Civil Authorities (DSCA) missions are not new to RED HORSE, but this one is different. "RED HORSE CONUS deployments in the past were ad hoc, with little time ahead to prepare," said Lt Col James Chrisley, 820 RHS deputy commander. "This is the first time we've had the opportunity to train as part of a large response force capable of responding to anything from a natural disaster to a terrorist attack."



An aerial view of a debris field 820 RHS Airmen from Nellis AFB, Nev., were tasked to clear during VIBRANT RESPONSE 10.1 exercise at Camp Atterbury, Ind. (U.S. Air Force photo)

Training

Personnel assigned to CCMRF attend additional CBRNE training, hazardous material awareness training, weeklong command-post-of-the-future courses, convoy briefings, tactical operations center training, and NORTHCOM training for CCMRF and DSCA awareness. Training was followed by the two NORTHCOM-provided field training exercises. Thirty RED HORSE personnel attended the first exercise (VIBRANT RESPONSE 10.1) in August in Kansas, where unit leadership tested their tactical operations centers skills using realistic computer simulation software.

VIBRANT RESPONSE 10.1

After arriving at Camp Atterbury, the team from Nellis received situation briefings, and bedded down in FEMA trailers, which, along with a stand-alone dining facility, and a small beddown area, became the RED HORSE base of operations during the exercise. Before leaving Nevada, Capt Jay Haugen and his team of 25 personnel from the 820 RHS and the 99th Logistics Readiness Squadron loaded 63 tractor trailers in two days to support the exercise. After in-processing, a team of 15 Airmen from the 820th spent the next 24 hours unloading the cargo under the direction of MSgts James Toth and Keith Gedick, the squadron's cargo movement NCOICs.

Personnel began the process of setting up the unit control center and maintaining command and control of personnel spread over multiple locations. As command and control equipment arrived, TSgt Ramil Flores, 820th computer operations NCOIC, worked tirelessly to establish network and overall communications capability.

Over the next four days, exercise mission assignments (MAs) flowed into the RED HORSE TOC. Every MA drove deliberate planning at each level of the CCMRF command. The Army's 4th Maneuver Enhancement Brigade, from Fort Leonard Wood, Mo., which served as RED HORSE'S direct headquarters, created fragmentary orders for each MA.

"At first we were focused on each unit individually, but we soon recognized that we could combine the core competencies of each unit to more effectively accomplish tasks," Maj Loren Hollinger, 4th Maneuver Enhancement Brigade Plans Officer stated. "It was a true joint endeavor."

"At any given time of day we had between 50 and 80 personnel on the road to sites or executing MAs," said SMSgt Scottie Spradlin, the 820th's cantonments superintendent. "Over a four-day period, we had personnel simultaneously clearing roads of debris, grading land for FEMA trailers, neutralizing utility lines, constructing walls or sidewalks, and repairing camp infrastructure."

The most daunting task faced by the unit was to remove debris from two kilometers of roadway. After receiving a briefing from the incident commander, equipment operators, lead by the 820th's TSgt Mark Ordway, unloaded earth-moving equipment from their tractor trailers. Marine EOD and Air Force Radiation Assessment Team technicians begin scanning the route for explosive or radiological hazards. Electricians and utility specialists wearing personal protective equipment checked for downed power lines and water-main breaks, and after determining that the electrical lines were dead and isolating one water main, the route was ready for heavy equipment.

After just a few hours on scene, more than 500 meters of debris had been cleared off the road and a "PAUSE-EX" was declared for the MA. The RED HORSE operators had to slow down; otherwise, there would not be any work left for the following day.

Members of the media and distinguished visitors at the site said they were surprised by how much of the road they were able to see again. TSgt Todd Mitchell, team NCOIC, briefed USNORTHCOM commander, Gen Victor Renuart, on the operation and TSgt Ordway fielded questions from the media, helping earn himself a "Joint Task Force–Civil Support Hero of the Exercise" Award.

"This is the kind of mission that we never want to have to execute, but we have to make sure that everyone in the country knows we're ready for," said TSgt Alfredo Perez, 820 RHS equipment operator. "If something terrible does happen, JTF-CS and the 820th RED HORSE will respond quickly to save lives, mitigate suffering, and facilitate recovery operations."

Capt Anderson is a project engineer with the 820 RHS, Nellis AFB, Nev.



While clearing debris during Operation VIBRANT RESPONSE, TSgt Mark Ordway, site NCOIC, gives direction to SSgt Timothy Yardley. Both Airmen are heavy equipment operators with the 820 RHS, Nellis AFB, Nev. (photo by SSgt Jacob N. Bailey)